



\$2.99 #20

Nodwick™

ARTAX
ILLUMINATED



Nodwick in: ARTAX ILLUMINATED

BY AARON WILLIAMS

or

"The Know-
It-All Ball"

I THOUGHT YOU
SAID SLIME-BASED CREATURES
DIDN'T LIKE FIRE! THAT TAUPE OOZE
BARELY SLOWED DOWN WHEN I
THREW A TORCH AT IT.

YOU MIGHT HAVE
WANTED TO PULL THE TORCH OUT
OF NODWICK'S HAND FIRST. THE FOOD-
TO-PAIN RATIO WAS A TAD TIPPED IN
THE OOZE'S FAVOR.

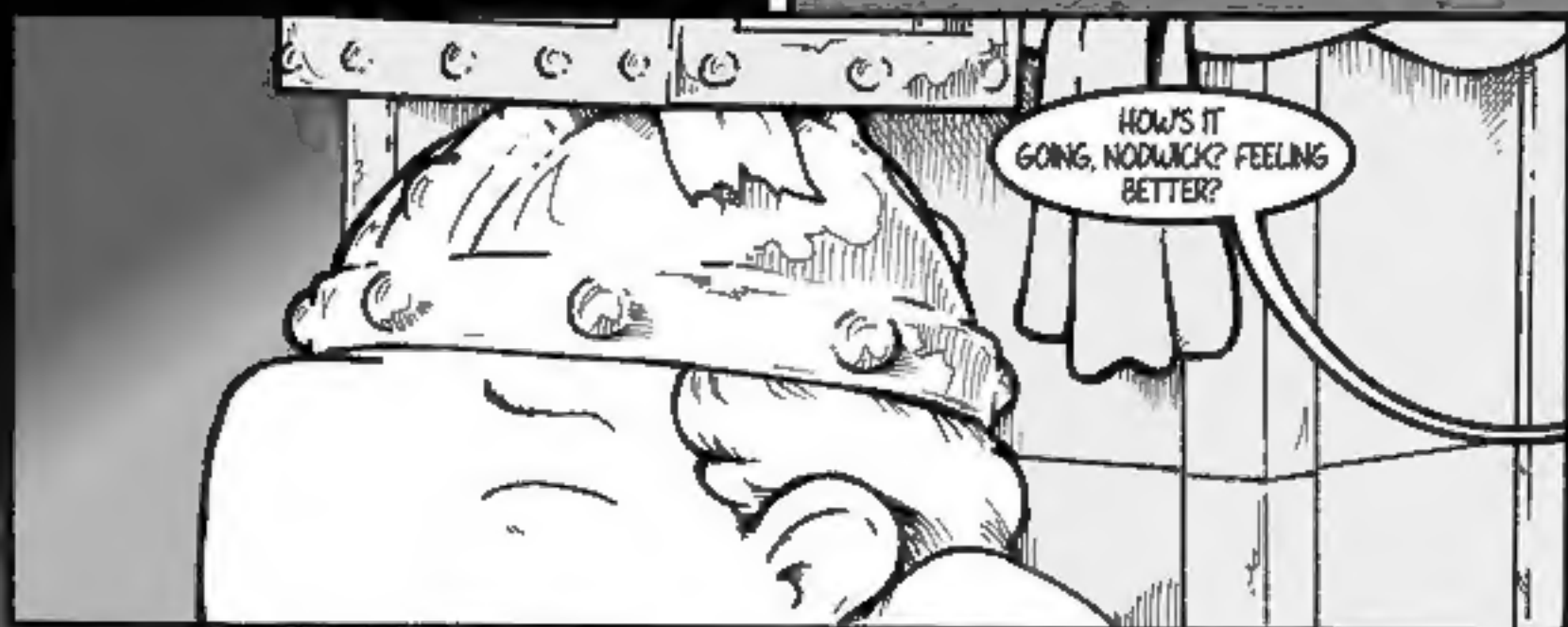
THERE WE GO!
YOUR SKIN WILL FEEL KIND
OF STICKY FOR A WHILE, BUT
THAT'LL GO AWAY AFTER IT
SETS UP.

NOW, ACCORDING
TO MY MAP, WE SHOULD
BE ALMOST TO THE END
OF THIS LABYRINTH.

I'M ALL FOR
THAT. C'MON, LET'S GET
OUT OF HERE.

SIGH... IT'S BAD ENOUGH
HAVING BEEN EATEN, INJURED, OR
VIOLATED BY THE LOCAL FAUNA EIGHT
TIMES TODAY, BUT HAVING TO
PUT UP WITH--





HOW'S IT
GOING, NODWICK? FEELING
BETTER?



JUST FINE,
NITWICK. I'M
STARTING TO FIRM
UP NICELY.

THAT'S GOOD.
I'D HATE TO BE THE **ONLY**
HENCHMAN WITH ALL
THIS **STUFF**.



YEAH. YOU MIGHT
ACTUALLY HAVE TO **STRAIN**
YOURSELF AND **CARRY**
SOME **LOOT**.

BUT NOT **HALF**
AS WELL AS **YOU** DO, **YOU**
DA **HENCH-MAN!**



LET'S STEP
ON IT, NODWICK! YOU'RE
HOLDING US UP!

WHAT A
SLAVE DRIVER,
HUH? WE'D
BETTER GET A
MOVE ON!

RIGHT.
NO SENSE IN
KEEPING MY ARCHES
COMPLETELY
INTACT...



THERE IT IS!

SO THIS ANCIENT WIZARD GUY FINDS THIS MAGIC THING, AND THEN HOLES HIMSELF UP IN A MOUNTAIN-WALLED VALLEY. IT SOUNDS LIKE HE WAS A RABBIT SHORT OF A MAGIC TRICK.

OR HE DIDN'T LIKE SALESPeOPLE.



I THINK HE DID IT FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES. THAT MAGIC "THING" IS SUPPOSED TO GIVE THE USER KNOWLEDGE BEYOND THEIR WILDEST DREAMS. THINK ABOUT IT: I COULD DISCERN ARCAINE SECRETS OF MAGIC LOST FOR CENTURIES!

SOUNDS LIKE YOU COULD FIND TREASURE WITH IT.

OR KNOW WHERE PEOPLE IN NEED OF HELP ARE!

OR FIND OUT WHERE THE CARNIVOROUS PLANTS ARE.



I FIGURED THE "GARDEN OF DOOM" WOULD HAVE DIED OFF BY NOW...

THIS ISN'T GOING TO LOOK GOOD ON YOUR RESUME! AT LEAST NITWICK'S KEEPING OUR HEALTH CARE COSTS DOWN.

I'M JUST DOING MY PART FOR THE TEAM, MISTER YEAGAR!



WHACK! WHACK! WHACK! WHACK!



NOW NO MORE NAUGHTY PLANTS FOR YOU!

UHGSPHELGUHHUM.

I THINK THE DIGESTIVE TOXINS HAVEN'T QUITE WORKED THEIR WAY OUT OF HIS SYSTEM YET...

NITWICK, PUT YOUR LOAD ON HIS. THAT'LL UP HIS HEART RATE AND GET HIM BACK TO NORMAL SOONER.

YEAGAR, DON'T YOU THINK YOU'RE WORKING NODWICK KIND OF HARD TODAY?

NOT AT ALL! HE'S NOT UNDER ANY MORE STRAIN THAN USUAL.

BUT YOU HIRED THAT OTHER HENCHMAN, SO I THOUGHT MAYBE HE COULD, UM, HELP NODWICK MORE?



I CAN'T LESSEN THE WORKLOAD FOR NODWICK! HE'D GET THE WRONG IDEA OF HOW WE OPERATE AND PROBABLY START TO COMPLAIN WHEN WE ACTUALLY NEED HIM TO CARRY STUFF!

BESIDES, NITWICK IS THE NEW GUY, AND HE SHOULD BE CUT A LITTLE SLACK. NODWICK IS SUPPOSED TO BE MENTORING HIM, BUT I HAVEN'T HEARD ANYTHING COME OUT OF HIS MOUTH EXCEPT COMPLAINING.

AND CRIES OF PAIN.

THAT'S COMPLAINING, TOO.



YOU'RE NOT STILL MAD HE FOUND OUT YOU ONCE HAD A GIRLFRIEND AND THEN HELPED TO RUIN YOUR FAVORITE CUSSWORD, ARE YOU?




NOT AT ALL! PERISH THE THOUGHT!

I GUESS SOMETHING ELSE IS BUGGING HIM.

RIGHT...



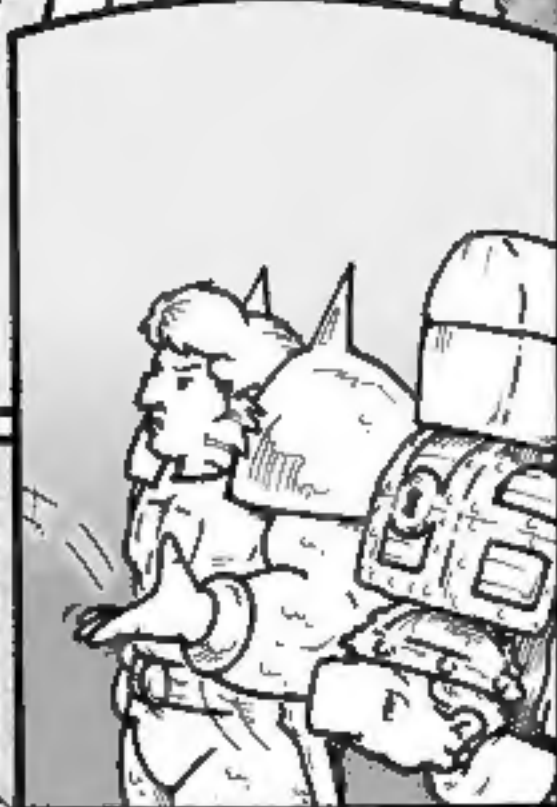
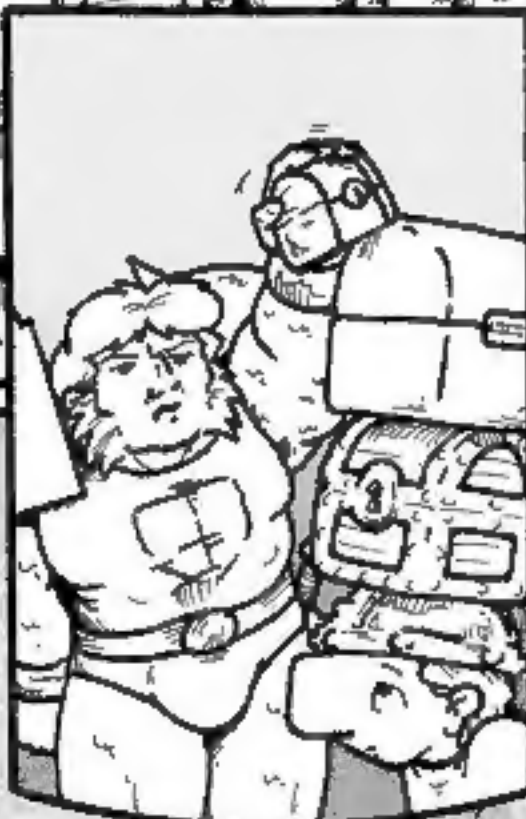


THIS LOOKS
TRAP-TACULAR.

YOU MAY BE RIGHT.
THOSE STONES IN FRONT OF THE BRIDGE
ARE WIZARD WAYMARKERS. IF WE GET CLOSER, THEY'LL
ACTIVATE. IT MIGHT NOT BE DANGEROUS. THEY
MIGHT BE USED MERELY AS WARNINGS OR
TO IMPART INFORMATION.

HEY, NODWICK!
GO CHECK OUT THE
BRIDGE!

IT LOOKS FINE
FROM HERE.

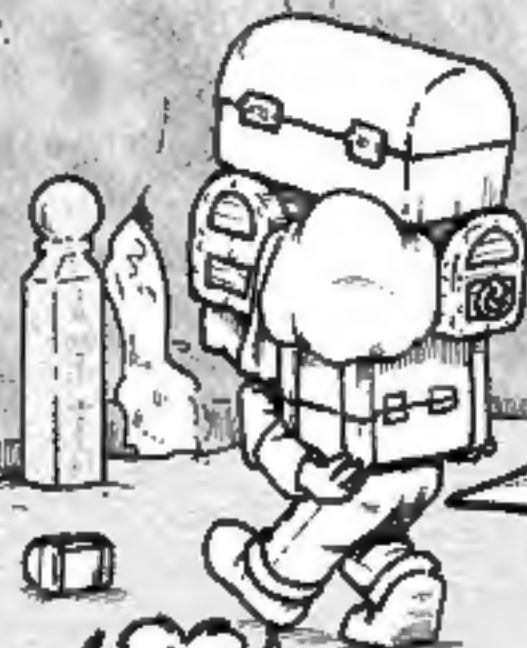


WHOOOPS!
BETTER GO PICK
UP THE BOX YOU
DROPPED.

SOMEONE IS
SO NOT GETTING
MARSHMALLOWS IN
THEIR COCOA
TONIGHT.

WELL, SOMEONE
HAS TO GO.

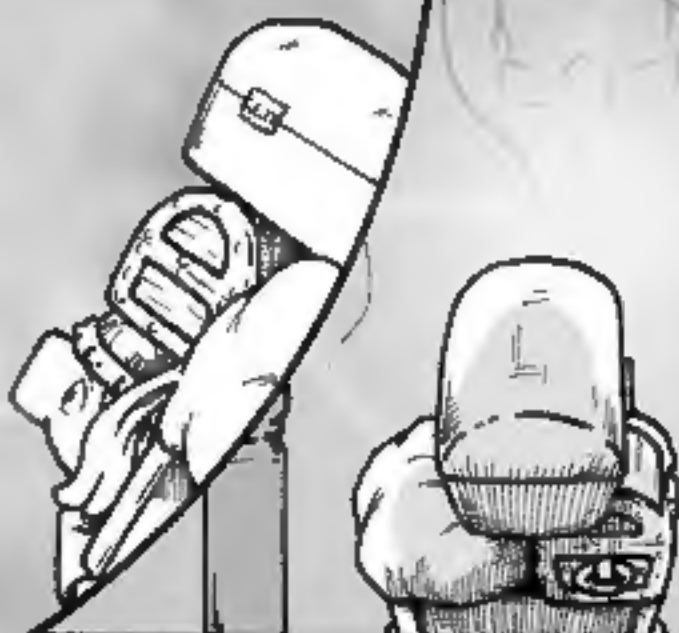
GO GET
'EM, NODWICK! IT'S
ALL GOOD!



HALT! KNOW THAT YOU
ARE ABOUT TO ENTER THE STRONGHOLD OF
VORU, A WIZARD SO POWERFUL AS TO BE LIKENED TO
A FORCE OF NATURE. KNOW ALSO THAT THE MOUNTAIN
BEFORE YOU WAS PULLED FROM THE GROUND
BY MY OWN HAND.

YOU ARE NO DOUBT HERE IN
SEARCH OF AN ARTIFACT I POSSESS.
KNOW THAT IT CARRIES WITH IT A
BURDEN TOO GREAT FOR EVEN
I TO BEAR.

BEGONE, LEST YOUR
MINDS BE BROKEN ALONG WITH
YOUR BODIES!



IS
THAT
IT?



NEVER ASK
RHETORICAL
QUESTIONS NEAR
ACTIVE MAGIC.

MAYBE IT JUST
TELEPORTED HIM AWAY.
NO NEED TO PANIC.



NOPE. IT CRISPY-FRIED HIM.
SOMEONE GET A BROOM.



I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS, ARTAX. IT SEEMS LIKE THERE ISN'T A HAPPY ENDING WAITING FOR US AT THE TOP OF THIS TOWER.

LOOK AT IT THIS WAY, YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO JUST LEAVE SOMETHING THIS POWERFUL LYING AROUND, WOULD YOU?

WELL, NO...

SO IF WE HAVE IT, SOMEONE WORSE DOESN'T, RIGHT?

ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU SAID RIGHT BEFORE WE GOT THE FONT OF ALCHEMY?

WELL...

THE TOWN'S WATER SUPPLY STILL TURNS WHITE CLOTHING PINK IF YOU AREN'T CAREFUL.

HEY, ART? NOT TO BE A WET BLANKET, BUT SHOULDN'T WE HAVE MET RESISTANCE OF SOME KIND BY NOW? WE'RE ALMOST HALFWAY UP THE TOWER!

NO WE AREN'T. I CAN STILL SEE THE BRIDGE.

I CAN TELL YOU FOR ALMOST A CERTAINTY THAT WE SHOULD BE AT LEAST TWELVE STORIES ABOVE GROUND BY NOW.

WOW! THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT! HENCH IT TO THE MAX!

NODWICK'S WHINING IS RIGHT. WHAT'S GOING ON?

IT MUST BE AN ILLUSION. THE QUESTION IS, WHAT KIND? WE COULD BE TELEPORTING BACK TO A LOWER PORTION OF THE STAIRS, WE COULD ACTUALLY BE NEAR THE TOP AND NOT KNOW IT...

LET'S HEAD BACK DOWN AND THINK THIS THROUGH.

AN HOUR LATER...

WE SHOULD'VE REACHED THE BOTTOM BY NOW.

HENCH ON!

THAT'S IT. WE'VE BEEN CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

MAYBE NOT...



MANY UNSEEN STEPS FOLLOW...

SIGH. MORE MOUNTAIN. AT LEAST THERE'S A WIDE LEDGE.

COME ON, NODWICK! LET'S GET THE LEAD OUT!

YEAGAR, ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE—

NEVER BETTER! OH, LOOK! MORE MOUNTAIN TO WALK ON!

THAT'S THE ~~WORST~~ GOOD MOOD I'VE EVER SEEN.

PLEASE MAKE SURE I'M NOT ALONE WITH HIM FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, OKAY?

OUR HEROES ARRIVE AT A MIST-SHROUDED BRIDGE...

I GUESS WE HAVE TO CROSS.

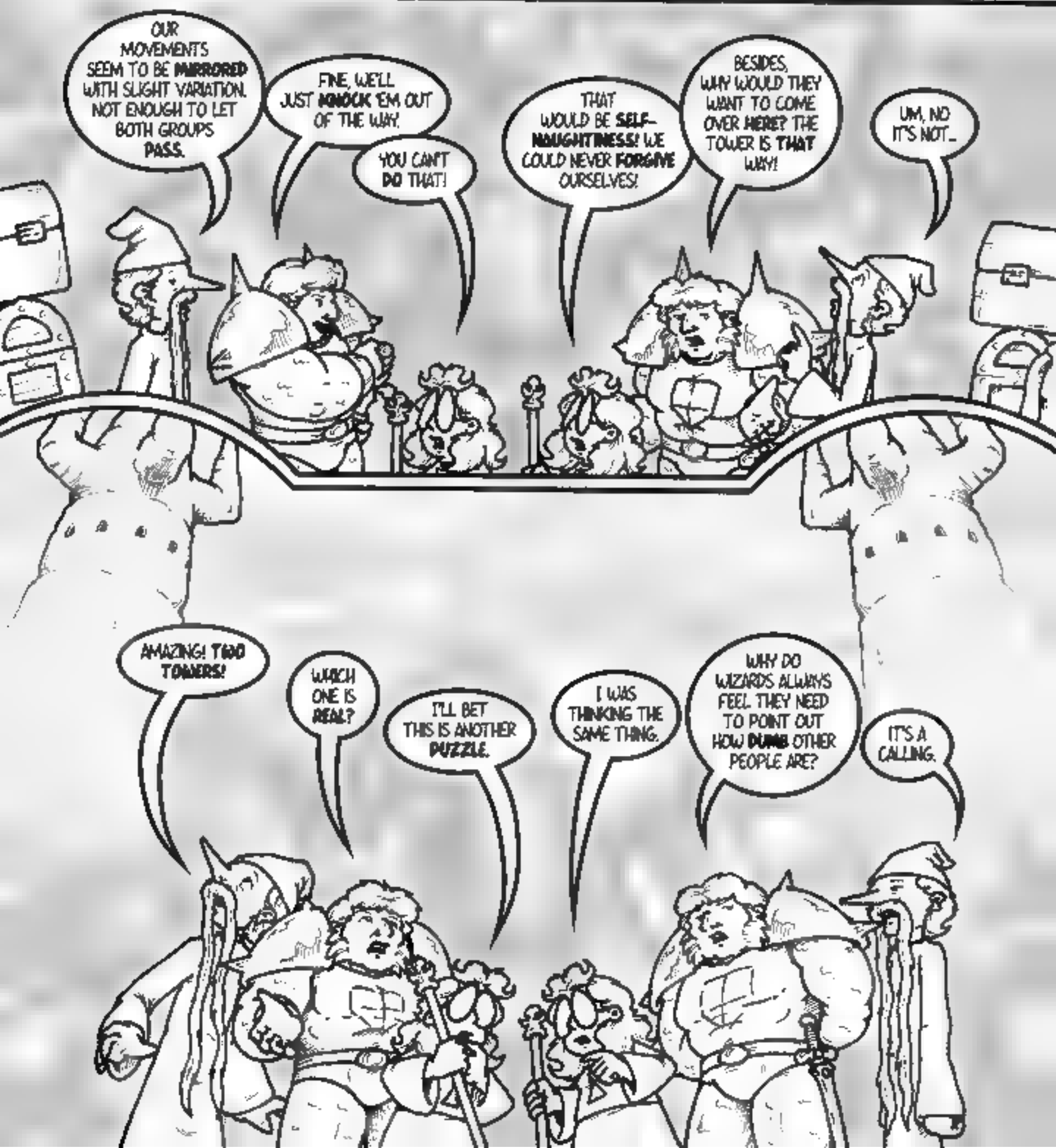
BUT THAT TAKES US ~~AWAY~~ FROM THE TOWER!

I DON'T SEE ANYWHERE ELSE TO GO, DO YOU?

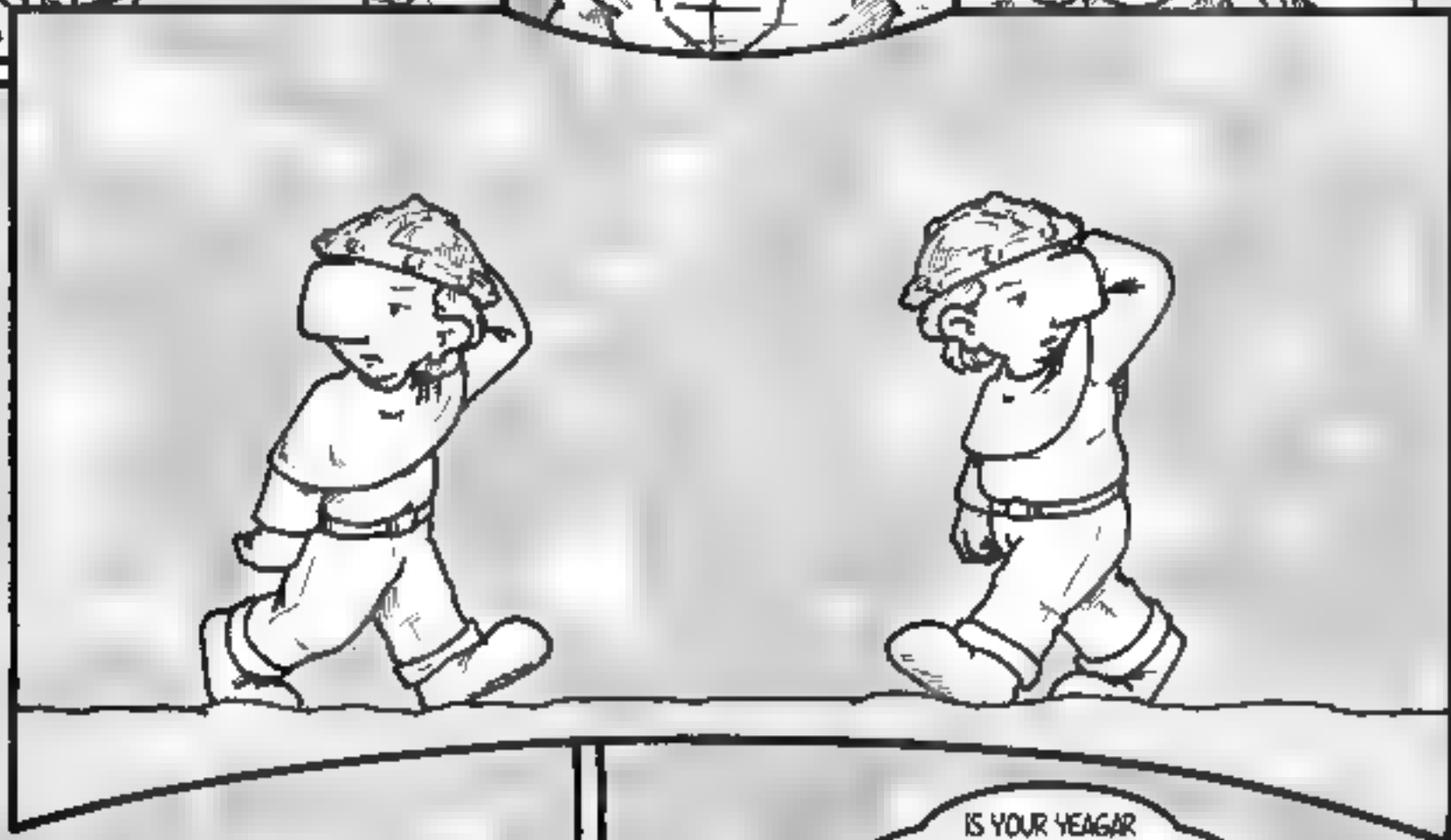
WHEAH! A CHANCE TO REST.

YOU SAID IT.







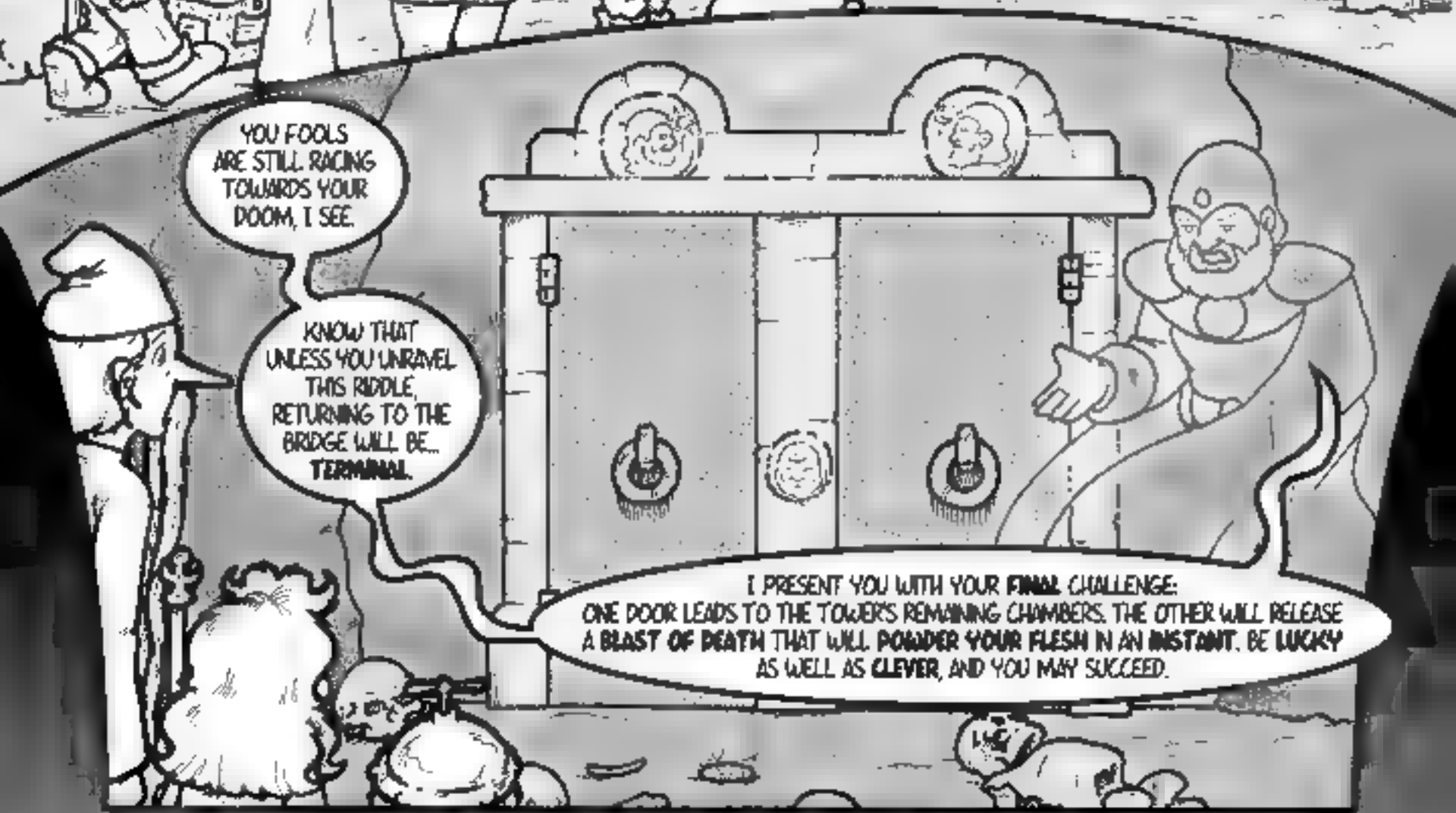




I'LL BET OUR DOUBLES
ARE ALSO ENCOUNTERING A DOOR THAT
WASN'T THERE BEFORE.

THIS IS
MAKING
MY BRAIN
HURT.

I HOPE IT'S IS
THE LAST MIND-TRANSFER
VORU HAS IN STORE
FOR US.



YOU FOOLS
ARE STILL RACING
TOWARDS YOUR
DOOM, I SEE.

KNOW THAT
UNLESS YOU UNRAVEL
THIS RIDDLE,
RETURNING TO THE
BRIDGE WILL BE
TERMINAL.

I PRESENT YOU WITH YOUR FINAL CHALLENGE:
ONE DOOR LEADS TO THE TOWER'S REMAINING CHAMBERS. THE OTHER WILL RELEASE
A BLAST OF DEATH THAT WILL POWDER YOUR FLESH IN AN INSTANT. BE LUCKY
AS WELL AS CLEVER, AND YOU MAY SUCCEED.



THERE'S
NO CLUE HOW
TO CHOOSE!

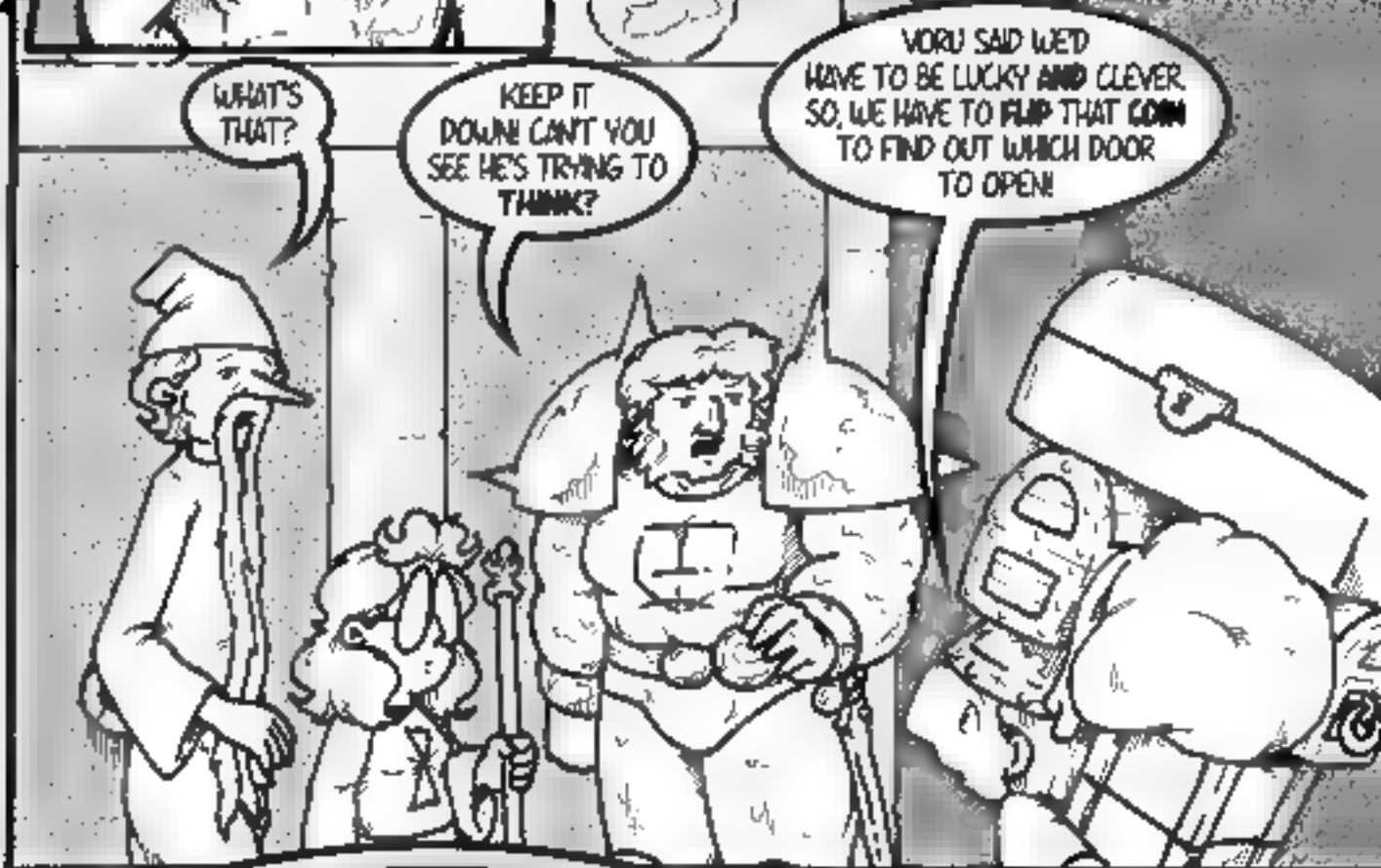
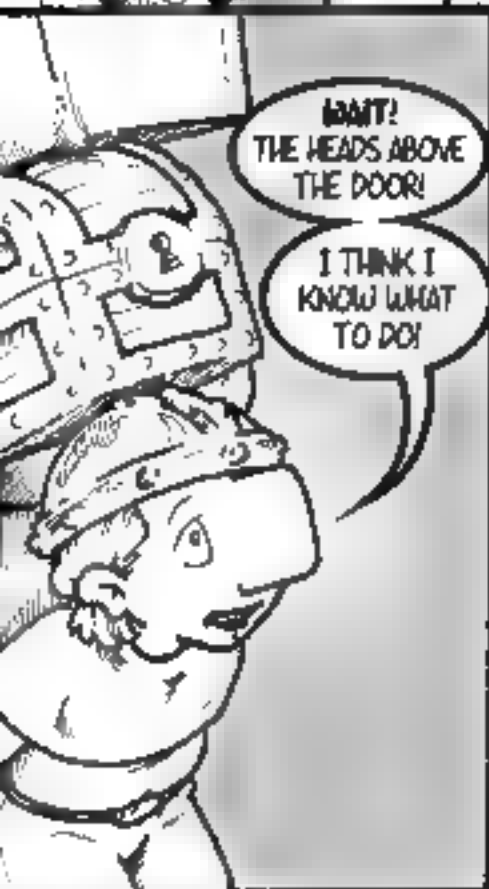
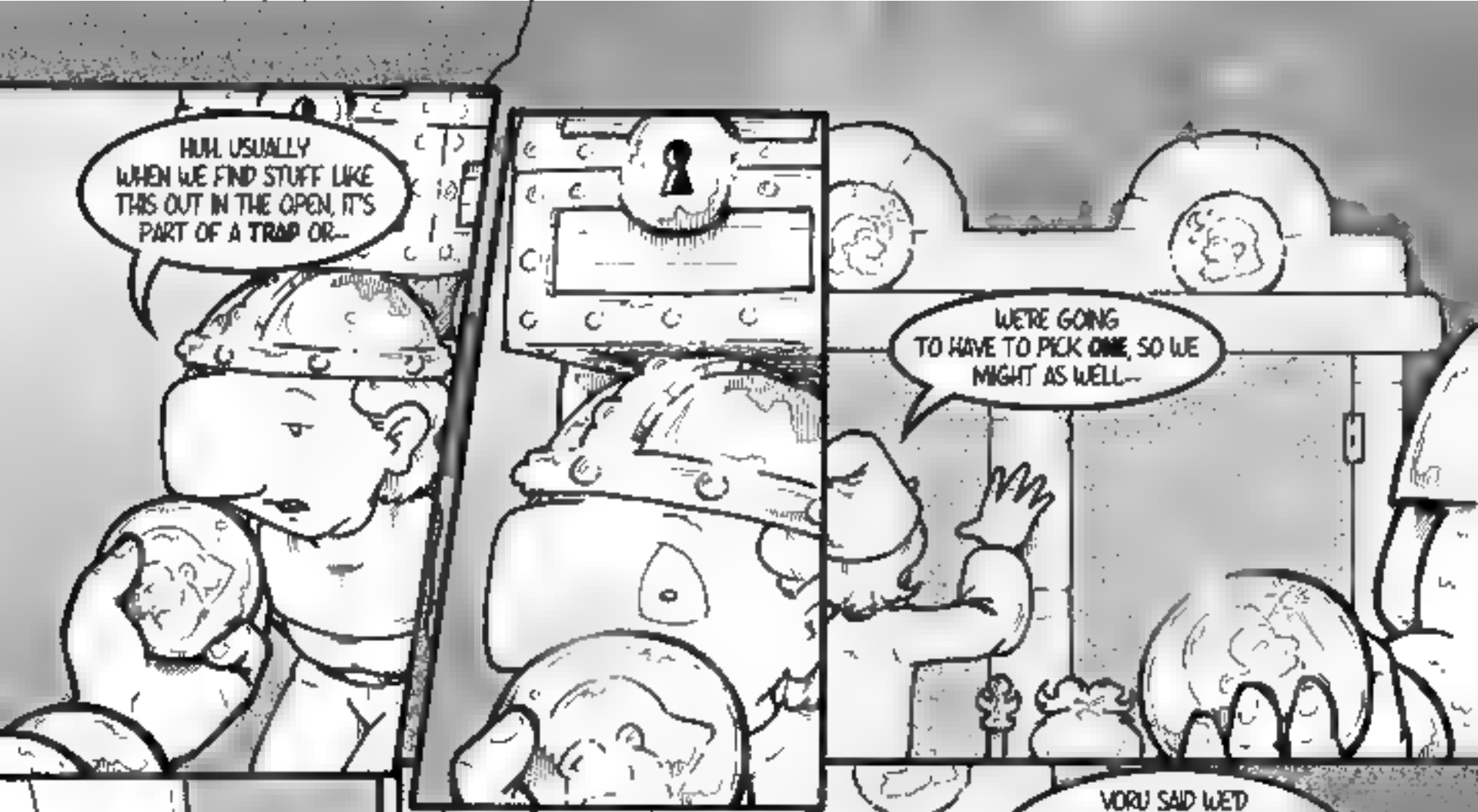
I DON'T
SUPPOSE WE
COULD JUST
GUESS?

LOOK HOW
MANY PEOPLE HAVE
GUESSED IN THE PAST.
YOU'D THINK ONE OF
THEM WOULD HAVE
OPENED THE RIGHT
DOOR BY NOW!

HEY, LOOK!
A COIN!

NICE WORK, NETWORK!
YOU ACTUALLY EARN YOUR KEEP, HERE,
NODWICK. DO SOMETHING USEFUL AND
ADD IT TO OUR HALL.







NO
DEATH
FOR US!
YAY!

GOOD WORK FINDING
THE COIN, NITWICK! KEEP IT UP,
AND YOU'LL BE RUNNING THIS
OUTFIT SOMEDAY!

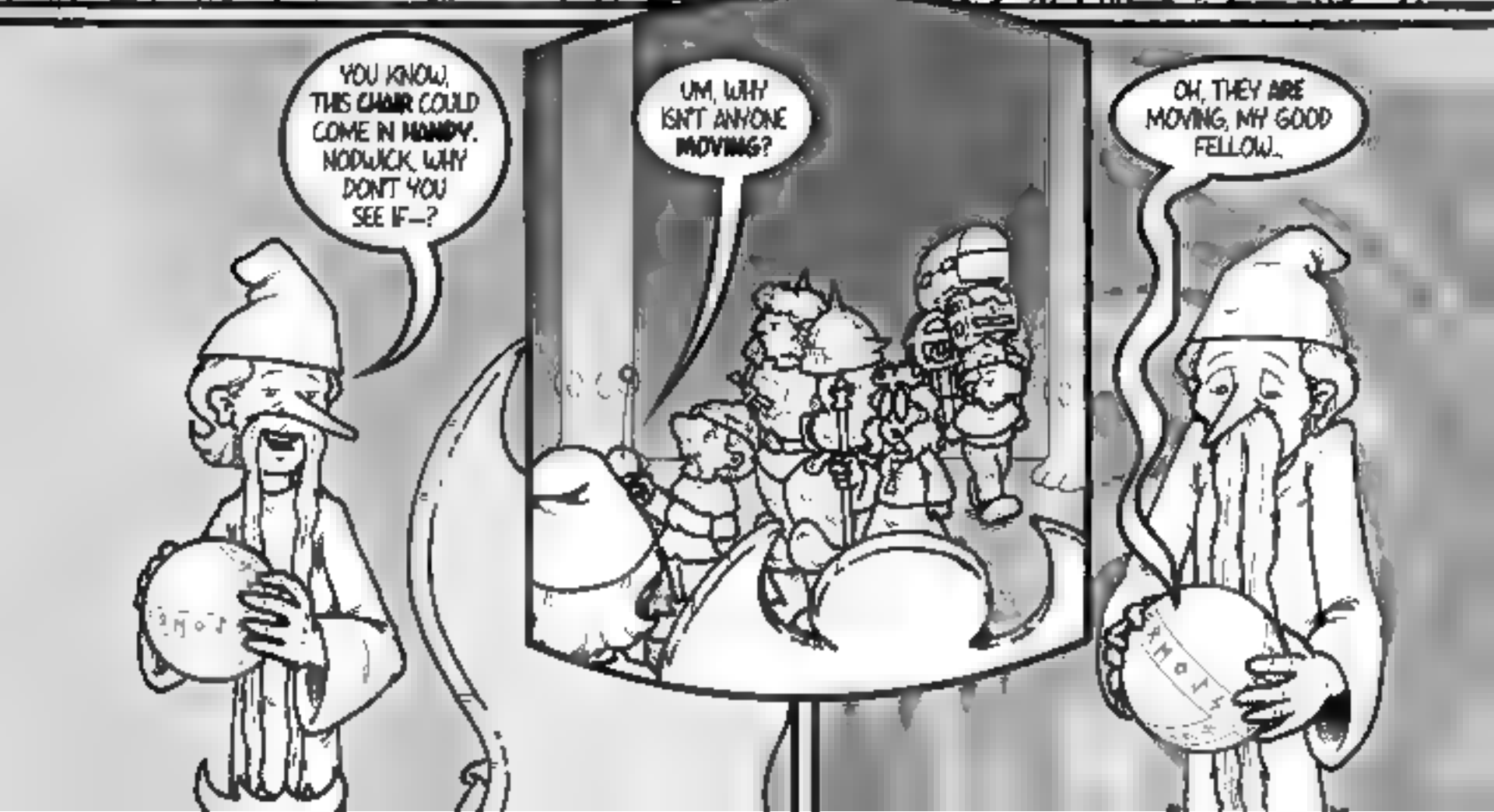
LOOK UPON THAT
WHICH RESTS BELOW MY
DESICCATED HAND, AND BEHOLD THE
ORB OF OMNISCIENCE. YOU HAVE
PROVEN YOURSELF WORTHY
OF MY RESPECT BY MAKING
IT THIS FAR.

I WOULD HOPE YOU HAD
THE WISDOM TO LEAVE AND DISTURB
NOTHING. HOWEVER, I KNOW THIS
WILL NOT BE THE CASE. I LEAVE YOU
TO YOUR FATE.

I HOPE THAT
MEANS HE'S FINALLY
DONE SHOOTING OFF
HIS MOUTH.

IS
THAT WHAT
WE'VE BEEN
AFTER?


THIS IS
IT. LET'S
TAKE IT BACK
AND PUT IT TO
GOOD USE!



YOU KNOW,
THIS CHAIR COULD
COME IN HANDY.
NODWICK, WHY
DON'T YOU
SEE IF--?

UM, WHY
ISN'T ANYONE
MOVING?

OH, THEY ARE
MOVING, MY GOOD
FELLOW.



IT'S JUST NOT AT THE SPEED OF THOUGHT, OMNISCIENCE IS CONSIDERABLY QUICKER THAN CORPOREAL MOTION.

I DO SAY, YOU'RE A SIGHT LESS DOUR THAN THAT YORU CHAP. ALTHOUGH NOT AS POWERFUL, IT WOULD SEEM HE MUST HAVE UNDERESTIMATED HIS CHALLENGES.

NOW LET'S NOT BE RUDE. ARTAX HAS COME A LONG WAY FOR HIS PRIZE, AND HE SHOULDN'T BE INSULTED BY IT, SHOULD HE?

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH TIME HE'LL HAVE, THAT FELLOW WITH THE GLOWING EYES IS COMING RIGHT UP THE STAIRS BEHIND HIS FRIENDS AND HE'S GOT QUITE A NASTY SPELL IN THE OFFING.

WHAT WAS THAT LAST PART AGAIN?

AH, YES... HE'S BEEN RUNNING AROUND WITH BAPHUMAI'AL. PITY THAT GOD IS CAUSING TROUBLE AGAIN, COULD BE THE END OF EVERYTHING.

SORRY FOR NOT INTRODUCING OURSELVES, AT LEAST COLLECTIVELY IF NOT INDIVIDUALLY. WE'RE THE SORCERERS AND WIZARDS WHO ORIGINALLY CREATED THE ORB OF OMNISCIENCE. WE PUT BITS OF OURSELVES INTO THE ORB TO KEEP IT RUNNING AND TO ACT AS A KIND OF INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR PEOPLE WHO WOULD USE IT. THERE ARE ALSO THE ECHOES OF PREVIOUS USERS IN HERE, WHO YOU'LL MEET LATER.

QUITE. WE'RE ALSO HERE TO EASE YOU INTO THE ORB'S POWER. KNOWING EVERYTHING ALL AT ONE GO WOULD MOST LIKELY SHATTER YOUR MIND. AND THERE ARE ENOUGH IMBALANCED PEOPLE HERE AS IT IS.

I DO BELIEVE I HAVE BEEN INSULTED. WAIT, I HAVE ACCESS TO ALL KNOWLEDGE. YES, I HAVE BEEN INSULTED!

I'VE NEVER SEEN A SPELL FROZEN IN TIME BEFORE. AMAZING!



HEY!
THAT'S ME!
HOW--?

ALL YOUR
PERSPECTIVE HAS
SHIFTED. IN TIME, YOU'LL BE
ABLE SEND THE POINT OF VIEW
YOU'RE CURRENTLY USING
ANYWHERE IN THE
UNIVERSE.

OF COURSE,
YOUR BODY WILL REMAIN WHERE
IT IS, SO YOU'LL NEED TO TAKE
PRECAUTIONS.

OKAY, WELL,
IN THE MEANTIME, IS
THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO
ABOUT THIS? I ASSUME
IT'S AIMED RIGHT
AT ME?

OH, MOST DEFINITELY.
HE'S CHANNELING PURE NEGATIVE
ENERGY THERE. YOU'RE GOING TO
TAKE THE BRUNT OF IT,
I'M AFRAID...

THERE
ARE SOME
SPELLS YOU
COULD USE, BUT
THE TRULY EFFECTIVE
ONES WOULD TAKE
FAR TOO LONG TO
CAST. I THINK
WE'LL HAVE
TO BE MORE
SUBTLE.

WELL, I DO
NOTE THAT THIS
COLUMN HAS A LARGE
INTERNAL FLAW. A
WEAK TELEKINESIS
SPELL APPLIED
JUST SO WOULD
TOPPLE IT.

AND THIS HENCHMAN
CARRIES A LARGE AMOUNT OF MATERIAL
THAT COULD ABSORB ENOUGH OF THE ENERGY
TO ALLOW YOU TO ESCAPE PERMANENT INJURY.
WE COULD USE THE COLUMN TO KNOCK IT
INTO THE PATH OF THE SPELL.

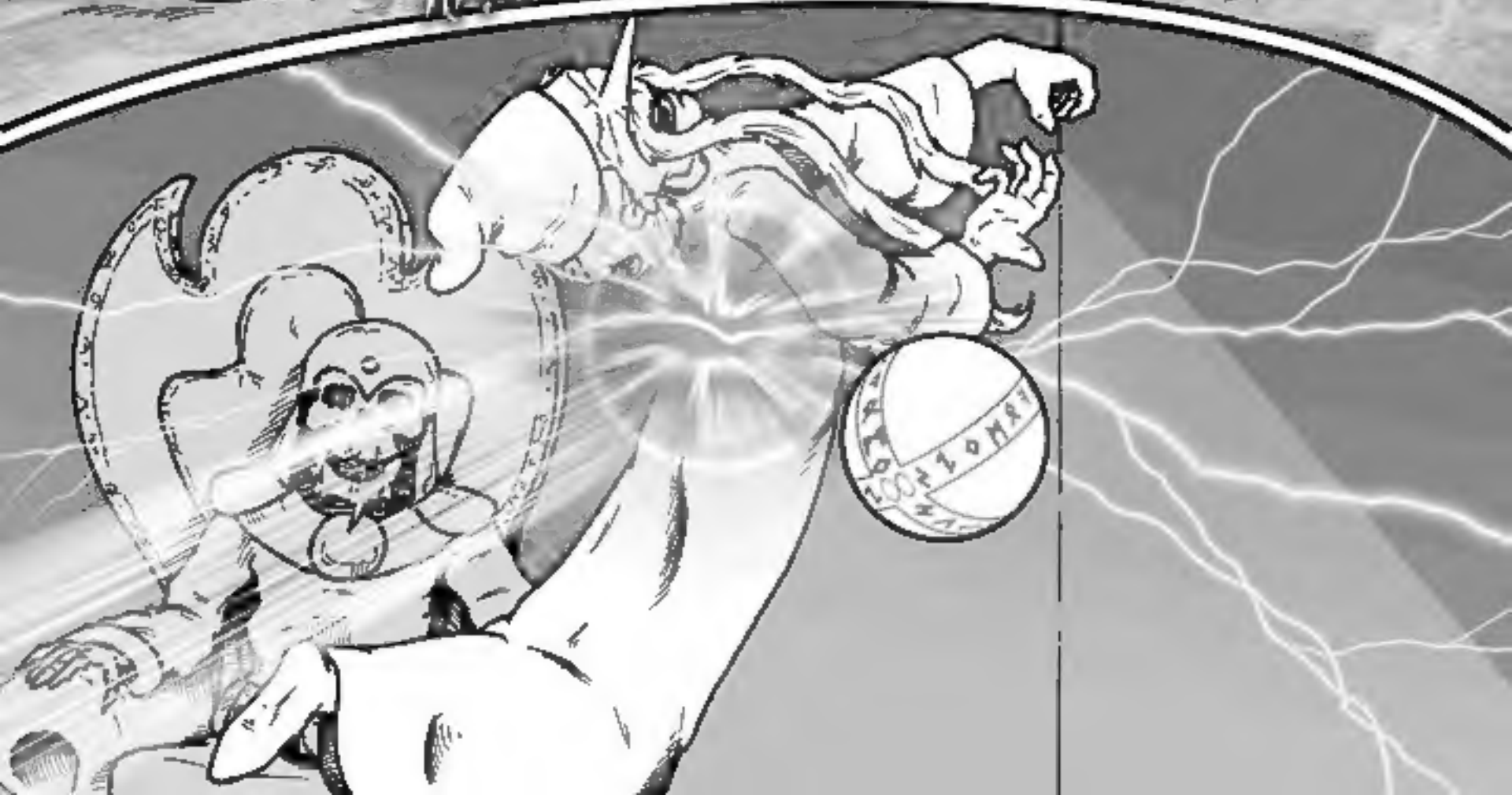
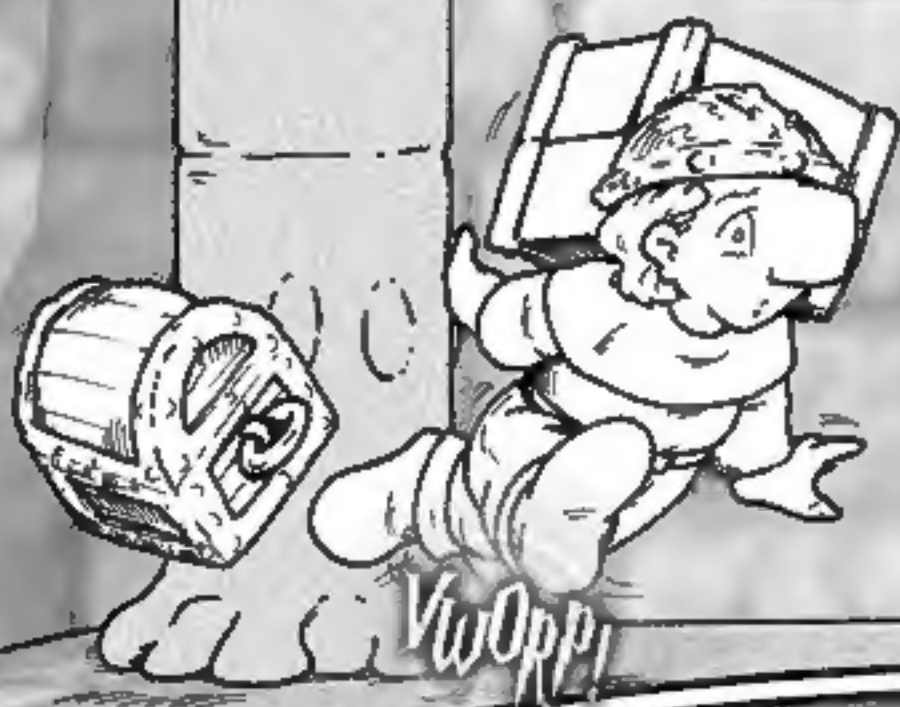
BUT HIS
LITTLE CLERICAL
FRIEND WOULD BE
DOOMED IN THAT
SCENARIO. SHE'D BE
CRUSHED BY
THE FALLING
STONES.

PIFFANY DYING
ISN'T AN OPTION.

BUT THEN
YOU'LL STILL BE ON THE
CHOPPING BLOCK,
OLD BEAN.

THEN WE'LL
JUST HAVE TO USE OUR UNLIMITED
KNOWLEDGE AND SHORT-TERM PROBABILITY
SKILLS TO COME UP WITH
ANOTHER PLAN.







ARTAX!

NOOOO!

WHOOMPH!

PUT IT
IN THE BAG,
INSECT.

YOU
ICKY-HEAD!
I'LL MAKE SURE
YOU DON'T HURT
ANYONE EVER
AGAIN!

AND I'LL
HAVE FUN PLAYING
KICK-BALL WITH
YOUR SKULL!

YOUR SWORD IS OF NO USE
AGAINST MY MAGICAL PROWESS, AND
YOU, MY DEAR, HAD BETTER SEE TO YOUR
GREEN-ROBED FRIEND...





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